not go as far as the Egyptians. Jesus is on his way to a triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Bethany was a small village about two-and-a-half kilometres from Jerusalem, beyond the Mount of Olives). In her own consciousness, the woman is anointing him as Messiah. But Jesus gives it a further interpretation: he says, "She doesn't realise it, but in fact she's preparing my body for death. It's a symbolic act." So the two uses of the oil - as an expensive cosmetic for important people like royalty, and as an embalming liquid for dead bodies – are used by Jesus to explain neatly that as the King, he must die. It is a point he has been trying to get across to his disciples since they recognised him as the Messiah.

This passage is often used as a justification for expenditure on things like buildings and stained glass and so on which, though extravagances, are a way of honouring God. This is because Jesus quotes *Deuteronomy* 15:11, "There poor are always there if you really want to help them." People often want to articulate their faith by building elaborate churches. (See the quotation at the end of this section.)

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